To promote Christian ideals for agriculture and rural life; to interpret the spiritual and religious values which inhere in the processes of agriculture and the relationships of rural life; to magnify and dignify the rural church; to provide a means of fellowship and cooperation among rural agencies: *Toward a Christian Rural Civilization.*"

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In Search of a Philosophy of Rural Life

By Thomas Alfred Tripp*

On Hilgarde Hall are these words: "To Rescue for Human Society the Native alues of Rural Life." This inscription on the agricultural building at the Berkeley campus of the University of California suggests our goal for a philosophy of ural life.

I

We seek no Utopian idealism. Instead, we need a realistic view of farm nd village culture. We face the fact that, while rural America may be the best lace to live and rear a family, it may also be the worst. We know that poverty nd social disorganization have overtaken large sections of farm life. As Carl aylor and his associates have reminded us, slums exist among farms -- if by slums e mean poverty, poor housing, lack of sanitation, and inadequate cultural services. Across the tracks" situations are to be found in rural towns as in cities.

It is not contended that rural culture is a panacea for all the ills of ivilization. Certain rural writers foretell the decline and fall of Western civlization, an event which is quite possible, if not probable. These agrarian philsophers fear that the rise of large cities, the complexity of the economic order, nd the accompanying concentration of political power will finally become too great or human comprehension. These same prophets often see rural culture as the Great olution. Rural people, they say, will rehabilitate the dying civilization. Such n explanation is obviously untrue to the possible facts for, by the time civilizaion collapsed, rural life would also be so urbanized and sterile that it, too, ould lack the power for social regeneration. In seeking a sound philosophy of ural life it is necessary, therefore, to consider the welfare of urban culture as ell. The problems of rural life will be solved, not only in farm and village communities but in the total economy of the nation.

In this atomic age some fearful persons are proposing that we run for over. The suggestion has been made that we disperse the cities out along the ighways for hundreds of miles. With all the harm done by urbanization, a high tandard of living requires efficient centers of commerce and industry. Taking the ities to the country is not the solution. The winning of an effective peace is a etter answer.

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* An address delivered before the Annual Meeting of the American Country Life Associaiation, East Lansing, Michigan, June, 1946. Dr. Thomas Alfred Tripp is Director f Town and Country Work of the Congregational Church. (Used with the kind permision of the American Country Life Association, Inc., Dr. Joseph Ackerman, President, 00 South Michigan Ave., Chicago, Illinois, and Dr. Orion Ulrey, Executive Secreary, East Lansing, Michigan.)

No one will take seriously a certain prophet of doom who believes, "this planet will be atmospherous, uninhabitable and uninhabited by chain-reaction in thirty-five years." He believes that "the physical science laboratory is the only instrument determining the future of civilization" and that "atomic research is un-Christian." It is not possible to take such statements seriously. Some of us maintain the faith that the agencies for philosophy building, program planning, and social action for rural life might assume the possibility of human existence upon the earth for thirty-six years or more; that sociologists, economists, ministers of religion, teachers, men of letters, and statesmen are still of some use in directing civilization; and that, while the dropping of the A-bomb on Hiroshima may have been un-Christian -- possibly the greatest crime against humanity during the war -- research for atomic energy to turn the wheels of industry, to pull the plows on farms, and to provide medical treatment for some of the new incurable scourges of humanity is in the direction of progress.

II

Far from scurrying for cover, we suggest building a philosophy of rural life sufficient to the times. Fortunately, we do not begin "at scratch." There are those who have gone before. The modern rural life movement in America has experienced three stages of evolution. The first phase began in 1909 with the Report of the Commission on Country Life. It was ended about 1919 by the changing rural social conditions which accompanied the close of World War I. During this period leaders of various agencies were busy exploring the meanings of the country life movement for their own programs. Stimulated by the interpretive sections in the Report of the Commission, rural leaders began the development of a philosophy of rural life.

The second stage extended throughout the 1920's and early 1930's; approximately from the close of World War I through the Great Depression. It may be characterized as the period of testing and of practical application of the rural philosophy under local community conditions. A sociological approach encouraged the use of the rural community survey and other techniques for adjusting programs to the rural cultural environment. This community orientation gave indigenous roots to rural theory.

Finally, depression conditions and the passing of many of the first generation rural leaders brought in the third and current phase of the rural life movement. Lack of adequate funds prevented expansion of rural programs and caused a decline in many fields. By 1936, practically all the stalwarts of the earlier stages of the rural life movement had passed from the scene of action by death, retirement, or change of vocation. Shortages of funds enforced a sober spirit in the making of rural policies; the loss of old leaders opened the door to new personnel who were, in general, formally trained in the rural social sciences, especially in rural sociology and agricultural economics. There was inaugurated a period of readjustment and integration in which the rural movement in the various agencies began to relate itself more closely with the total program of each agency and to adapt the theory and techniques of the learned disciplines to country and village culture. Rural policy and philosophy have reached the stage of integration, i.e., of seeking their place in the policy and philosophy of the total economy.

It is possible that a fourth phase of the rural life movement is at hand as a result of World War II and the subsequent postwar situation. If this conjecture be true, the next period will, in all probability, be more realistic than

ny previous phase. The tools of sociological investigation have advanced, more scientific facts regarding rural society have been made known, and experience in rural policy-making has grown apace as a result of considerable experimentation. It appears that the coming years may see a realistic development of the necessary program, adapted to the new social frontiers of rural society and founded upon the basic characteristics of agrarian culture.

III

The fundamental resources of rural society, reduced to the minimum, are apparently these: (1) the Land, (2) the People, and (3) the Social Process.

1. The significance of land, the soil, is well-recognized. Liberty Hyde Bailey's THE HOLY EARTH early set the pace for this influence in rural philosophy building. All humanity arose from the earth and lives by the products of the land. The meaning of the soil is not to be understood alone in romantic terms and in the mystic beauties of nature. We are faced with some hard and realistic issues. The landless peasant and the hard-bitten, large scale cash-crop machine age farmer are both endangering our land resources today. The former has never learned the love of land by ownership; the latter has lost any appreciation of the soil he may have ever had by considering the land as a resource to be mined in a competitive economic struggle.

Through malpractice in agriculture our soil is being destroyed. Wind and water erosion still wins the race with the soil conservationists. Notwithstanding the remarkable program of the Soil Conservation Service, we still face the question of continued existence of mankind on the earth. In terms of 2,000 years from now, let us say, will man have land resources to live on this continent if erosion continues at the present rate? The fate of Palestine and North Africa for the Corn Belt in America seems as unthinkable to us as it might have to Jerusalem and Carthage when they prospered as the centers of their respective worlds.

Can we use the land and have it? At the moment, the answer for the long-run is "no". We are overdrawing on the bank of nature's fund of land to maintain our present level of culture. Culture is closely tied to the quality of the soil. Economic realism tells us that we must have high soil fertility to maintain good culture. Our search for a philosophy of rural life must begin with the land.

2. The people on the farms and in the villages are the second foundation of a rural philosophy. We start the search with the psychology of the peasant. Rural culture is composed of the factors which create and condition the mentality of rural people. The peasant mind is adjusted to natural resources and to intimate human relationships in the relatively simple neighborhood. In its most common and basic form, rural culture is the outgrowth of the vocation of farming. Rural culture originated with the frontier farmer who tilled the soil by manual labor. To some degree it is still oriented to the peasant who walks behind the plow or wields a hoe with his own hands, bound to the land by psychological and economic necessity.

However, many rural people in America do not conform to the peasant pattern, although the peasant-frontier element is still a very important factor in the rural culture. Some rural people are sub-peasants who have neither an adequate relation to the soil nor a true love of land. These folk include the agricultural migrants, share-croppers, other landless farm laborers and rural slum-dwellers.

At the other extreme, there are the relatively prosperous, landowning, machine-age farmers to whom soil may be only a resource to be exploited and who are not bound to place by either poverty or love of the land. Still other rural people live in the villages and rural towns which are often most highly affected by the encroachments of urbanization. Each of these groups, from the sub-peasant to the highly capitalized farmer and the villager, has its own peculiar influence, both beneficial and harmful, upon rural culture.

The search for a philosophy of rural life is, in part an endeavor to recapture the peasant psychology but largely, an attempt to discover the peasant equivalent for the modern agriculturist.

3. The rural social process involves all rural institutions -- the school, the church, the extension service, the farm organizations and the various other forms of association among farmers and villagers. It also includes those social forces which comprise the rural culture. As Ralph Turner has suggested, rural culture is the socially organized and transmitted structure of behavior and thought of rural people. It consists of the traits and patterns which are historically derived and which combine to act as an integrating force for individuals and groups in rural society. Rural culture is a complex of ideas, ideals, beliefs, and social habits which unify and control the behavior and thought of people who are related to the extractive vocations. In the main, it is the mode of life in agricultural society. While rural culture is always changing, it has a relatively high degree of stability on which to construct a philosophy of rural life.

The rural social process is the means of initiating persons into a growing understanding of the general knowledge of civilized people, the skills of the rural vocation, the lore of rural culture, and the art of rural living.

The rural social process involves an orientation of the social institutions to rural culture. A philosophy of rural life will include a recognition of the values in rural life for people who toil on the land and who exist in the more or less intimate relationships of neighborhood and community processes.

A rural philosophy will assume an appreciation of the soil and the conservation of other basic natural resources of the earth. It will seek ways to create love of nature and teach the lessons of the countryside. It will recognize community resources as a means for learning and cooperative enterprise as a way to satisfactory living. It will seek to stimulate individuals and families to become integrated into effective communities for their mutual development.

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